

Interviewee: I started in 1917, hired on Thanksgiving Day-Number Seven. They was all, nine bosses there, and went to work the next day, after Thanksgiving, 1917. At \$2 and something, nine hours. And I worked with timber men about two or three months, and I was wanting to go to railroad, and went to breaking on mortar. And that's when they killed a man and hired one, and they killed a mule and bought on, and they thought more of a mule than a man them days. They cost them very little if they got a man killed. We paid our own compensation, a certain percent, the company paid a certain percent, something like Social Security in them days. And I think, if I ain't mistaken, Dr. Hatfield, Governor Hatfield, changed that thing when he came in as Governor of the state of West Virginia. I ain't sure.

Interviewer: I didn't know about that, either.

Interviewee: But I was personally clean with Dr. Hatfield. He was senator a couple of terms, you know? Wonderful man, and his relatives, Deb Lance, personally claim to fame and all of his family. And I worked 42 years here for _____ Creek in the mine. I've been retired now 14 years. I was just checking up there. I retired in –

Female: It was in '58.

Interviewee: '58, '58, 1958. And I've been busier since I retired, social work, church work than I was when at the mine. That keeps me going and feeling good, though. I don't just sit down and worry over nothing.

Female: Well, she wants to know what the union – what the union, how you got it and all like that.

Interviewee: We got it the hard way. That's what you wanna know, ain't it?

Interviewer: Yeah, I'd like to know how it was in the 1920s, you know, before you were able to organize.

Interviewee: They absolutely was tough on anybody that was known _____ towards the union, before '33. We know who was getting paid so much a ton for that, ever since the coal went out to Logan County. That's Don Chafin. He got a certain percentage of every ton of coal that went out to keep the union outta here. And he had the effort of 300 deputy sheriffs or thugs looking after that, and they'd put you away if you –

Interviewer: If you, like, talked out about the union?

Interviewee: If you was – Lord, you better not mention it.

Interviewer: You know, I think there was a Elijah Maze I was talking to who said that when he was working here that, you know, of course nobody was allowed to join the union or even to talk out about it, but they still all kinda felt like union men at heart. They kinda were –

Interviewee: That's right, there was plenty of heart, but, Lord, they dreaded the – this overlord that was protecting the coal company. And they was – everybody was pretty well tired for organized labor, but great day in the morning, it never happened this side of Blair Mountain, south of Blair Mountain, 'til 1933, and I was the first president and the first – the first charter was issued this side of Blair Mountain. It was 5813, seven whole. We organized when a man from Charleston, the organizers were fighting just to keep us from _____ Creek. They was afraid of _____ Creek. I was the first man fired over it. Next day after the blue eagle come out, the _____ come out.

Interviewer: And what was the blue eagle?

Interviewee: That would give us a right to the union of our own choosing.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Under dear old Franklin D. Roosevelt and John L. Lewis.

Interviewer: Was the blue eagle the symbol of the union?

Interviewee: That was the blue eagle. It give organized labor, uh, a law passed –

Interviewer: Oh, uh-huh.

Interviewee: it give 'em a right to organize-the organization of their own choosing, see? And believe it or not, the day it come out, I got 180 some signatures, seven whole, and took 'em into headquarters, to Logan. Mr. Stone was from Charleston. He was the head organizer for this, and he was scared to death. All them fellers were scared to death. But we went ahead and organized before you know it, and we got the first charter at seven.

Interviewer: Well, well let me ask you another question. You said that, I guess, John L. Lewis had hired all these guys up in Charleston – Stone and the others – to come down here and [crosstalk]

Interviewee: That was district 17 people. You know they had almost hound-dogged the union out of the state of West Virginia in '33. Most of them, they had a probably a few local unions. But them come from district 17. I know Mr. Stone did, and Mr. Smith come from – I forget his first name. But he wasn't alone about organizing Logan County. Dehue was the hardest place we organized, the last place we organized in Logan County, and it wasn't very long after we organized everything else that we sat in on Dehue, captive mines that used to be separate. Captive mines and the other mines that they had a separate contract. But that didn't last but a few years but he covered all the ones, see?

Interviewer: Where were these mines? They were at Dehue. Do you know, was it US Steel _____?

Interviewee: Dehue was the Youngstown –

Interviewer: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

Female: Steel.

Interviewee: Steel.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: Youngstown Sheet and Tube.

Interviewer: Where is Dehue?

Interviewee: It's up Rum – Rum Creek here.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: You know where the mouth of Rum Creek is?

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: It's up there, the first big mines up in there, an old mine, the big mine. So, we organized and we didn't get what everybody thought we was gonna get. We thought we'd get the world and little red tents around. We had some trouble with Illinois's progressive community and tried to bust us, see? And we beat the hide off of them, and got rid of them. They were sure scatted out of Logan County.

Interviewer: Can you tell me something about that?

Interviewee: About the progressive?

Interviewer: The proggies, yeah.

Interviewee: Progressive miners come in just a few months after we had Logan County organized. They sent fellas in from Illinois, and they got what was coming to them and left here.

Interviewer: They were, like, a dual union?

Interviewee: Yeah, yeah, just like a dual union that's working today. Miners for Democracy is a dual union, a dual movement inside United Mine Workers _____. John L. Lewis said, time and again, years ago if the United Mine Workers is ever broke, it'd be broke within and not without. And that's what I'm afraid's gonna happen. It ain't gonna hurt me much, because I've done about what I've come here to do, according to age and time. 75 past.

Interviewer: Now, now these progressives were pretty much the same thing. They were trying to organize –

Interviewee: They tried to bust the United Mine Workers. That was – a few local unions in Indiana, um ah, it was mostly in Illinois.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: But they ain't no more.

Interviewer: Were the miners here not responsive to them?

Interviewee: There was a few talked to 'um. They had a few did.

Interviewer: Why do you think those few took up with them? What was wrong with the United Mine Workers?

Interviewee: Well, there are a few people that can be led with –

Female: They'll follow anything.

Interviewee: following anything. You know that kind. There are a few people in any community or any place, you can give them a little honey coating and they'll follow anything. They didn't last long. Now, out here, we got a cut right here. I was section boss when this happened and I was getting \$160 a month, and we worked six, seven, eight days a week, Saturday-men did, at a salary of \$160 a month, and all of this was coal _____ and this was day labor.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: And we got a big cut after that, 1928, '29, or '30, we got a big cut.

Interviewer: This was in 1928?

Interviewee: That's 1928, the big – that's from my report.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm. Do you have any of these papers for a later years or just this one?

Interviewee: What's that?

Interviewer: Do you have any of these papers for later years or just this one?

Interviewee: That's the only one _____.

Interviewer: It's really interesting.

Interviewee: Around here when –

Interviewer: It's a real antique.

Interviewee: they was working this mine out. You can have that if you want it.

Interviewer: Well, thank you.

Interviewee: But I'd rather you just take some of that out of there, if you _____ wanting that.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewee: And –

Female: Give her a book, honey. There's a book honey, if you wanted something to write on.

Interviewee: She can write right over here if she wants to.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: Now, we got a big cut on tonnage _____. Them people was getting – they was loading a three ton car –

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: with .95 and 1.05. That 1.05 was wet places and air places, headings and so on. They got .10 more on the car. That was a three ton car for sure, and they furnished their own powder, their own tools, and their own everything.

Interviewer: Hmm. When did they start making the cuts? Right after this date here?

Interviewee: I believe it was in '29 when they give a big cut.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm. Had things been going up pretty much through the '20s or staying pretty much the same?

Interviewee: Pretty well the same in the '20s.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Interviewee: And in other words, a miner makes as much in a day now that most miners made in –

Interviewer: Whoa.

Interviewee: two or three weeks and a month. Right here's a good picture I want you to look at.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Interviewee: Probably you've seen that before.

Interviewer: Aw, how about that?

Interviewee: That was cut out of the miner's journal. That's a cousin of mine.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: I'm gonna see him before winter sets in I think. He's over here on Pecan Creek or Pinson Fork, Pecan Creek.

Interviewer: He lives out – he still lives over in Pinson Fork?

Interviewee: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Interviewee: And that's his second wife. His first wife died. That woman's not half as old as he.

Interviewer: Oh, yeah?

Interviewee: I believe she's a bit better looking than him, don't you?

Interviewer: Well, she's pretty good looking.

Interviewee: Woo!

Interviewer: Maybe we should go over and interview him, too.

Interviewee: Well, you ____.

Interviewer: Sounds like he's been through a lot.

Interviewee: He can give you plenty information, any more than I could, probably.

Interviewer: Well, let me go back a minute and ask you a few more questions. You said that in the '20s, all the areas south of Blair Mountain was non-union.

Interviewee: That's right.

Interviewer: Now –

Interviewee: After '21, that was the Blair Mountain moor, known as the Blair Mountain moor. You've read [crosstalk]

Female: My great uncle was killed there.

Interviewee: She had an uncle killed in that.

Interviewer: Do you – do you – do you know much about that? Could you tell me some details about that?

Interviewee: I know – I know plenty.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Interviewee: They forced miners here by the hundreds to go on and fight and paid them well, equipped them with guns and ammunition and food and clothing, and they was – hundreds of them, was fighting them miners on that mountain. Her uncle was the deputy sheriff here in Logan County, and he got 30 – 30 high-power bullets through his body. He was killed on top of Blair Mountain.

Interviewer: What was his name?

Female: Gore.

Interviewee: John – John Gore.

Female: John Gore.

Interviewer: That was a relative of yours. I've heard of John Gore.

Female: And he was – he was my uncle.

Interviewee: Her uncle.

Female: He married my mother's sister.

Interviewee: Do you know they called a train load of troops with artillery and everything in here, come into Logan. They stayed for three or four weeks, like a regular army.

Interviewer: Now, did you fight in the battle?

Interviewee: I did not.

Interviewer: Were you asked to go out there?

Interviewee: I was asked and they didn't force me. I was the night foreman at that time.

Interviewer: Over here at [Crosstalk]?

Interviewee: [Crosstalk] seven whole.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Interviewee: And on about –

Female: [Crosstalk]

Interviewee: on about the first of July I got in the mine action and got a foot cut all to pieces and ankle broke, and I was in the hospital. And I think that them troops came in on about the fourth or fifth of July. And that was a real war, sister.

Interviewer: So, you missed out because you were in the hospital.

Interviewee: Yeah, I'd a missed out if I hadn't a been in the hospital. I wouldn'ta went.

Interviewer: You were lucky.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: You never had –

Interviewee: I wouldn'ta went. I'da got fired, probably, me being a salaried man.

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Interviewee: And – but I wouldn't have went. Not that I was afraid. I was game as any of the rest of them or more, but I wasn't fighting and wasn't gonna fight against the union. And I had brother-in-laws lived in over on that side, union side was fighting this way anyway.

Interviewer: Oh you did. They were fighting on the other side?

Interviewee: They was fighting with the union side.

Interviewer: Did they ever tell you stories about what it was like for them up there?

Interviewee: It was hell. They had it well in hand when the Army come in – they sent the Army in here through the influence of coal companies and Don Chafin. And it woulda been a slaughter if went a few days longer, if they hadn'ta been....

Interviewer: What were they aiming to do, invading up there?

Interviewee: They was aiming to organize this side of the mountain.

Interviewer: Uh-huh. Now, were there minors on strike down here that they were coming to help, or they just –

Interviewee: No, no, they never was on no strike 'til after '33. It was – my god almighty, they was afraid to open their mouth, the miners were.

Interviewer: Wow.

Interviewee: Don Jasons outfit really had it under control, 100 percent.

Interviewer: Can you tell me what happened? How was John Gore shot? Do you know the story of his death?

Interviewee: You know more about that, honey, than I do. They was –

Female: Well, honey, I was just a little girl ____.

Interviewee: they was fighting – top of Blair Mountain was a war zone.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: They was coming in (and on)____ the other side and the deputy sheriff from this side, about daylight, I think, it was when he was killed, wasn't it? Wasn't there one or two more killed with him?

Female: Huh? I was at my sister's, and I was just a little girl _____. And my sister lived at the – up at Accoville –

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Female: Up above Mam. My sister and I was about 10 years old when all that happened, and I don't know [crosstalk] wasn't old enough to know much about –

Interviewee: They killed him and I believe two more, wasn't it? And they set the high-powered empty shells that got him and left a note on his chest in 30-30. They spent that ammunition. A preacher was supposed to kill him. Or, he confessed to that. I don't know what – whether he did or not. He had a good chance to do it.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: But I figured –

Female: We never did know, I don't reckon. We never did get nobody from there –

Interviewee: Take your coat off. You want something to drink?

Interviewer: No, thanks. I'm just taking my sweater off. So –

Female: It's warming up out there.

Interviewee: Let me put it over here.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee: No, she was tough, and nobody was allowed to – every – all the property belonged to coal company, see? And they never sold this property until long-20 years after it was organized. I was the first man fired. I know down in Logan County they were organizing and I give bond for my house. They threwed them out right and left. People didn't know what to do, and I gave bond, so I appealed mine to higher court, and we had a contract for....

Interviewer: Can you tell me a little more detail about that? Now, this was in 1933?

Interviewee: It's all, they organized in '33, you see?

Interviewer: And you had joined a local union.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: And they found out about it?

Interviewee: Yes they did. They found out that night, and the next morning I was fired.

Interviewer: Did they fire other people at the same time?

Interviewee: Oh, they fired hundreds in the next few days. Everybody – the leaders of –

Female: [Crosstalk]

Interviewee: _____ leading and organizing, the leaders, they fired right and left, throwed them outta their house with their furniture, put them out on the road and –

Interviewer: How did you finally get reinstated?

Interviewee: It took a year or more. They put me on – the company wanted to hire me. They put me on as a check weigher, checking the loaders' weight with the company weight, weighing them, you know? And we had a big uprising here and all on Crick's Mines come out, and I was president of our local union. And they all come out on walk out strike, and I wouldn't agree for our mine to come out, but they brought 'em out anyhow. And we had telegrams from John L. Lewis and Van Bettner was district president of 17 then.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Telegrams from them, there was a wild cat strike and wouldn't be tolerated, to keep the mines open by any means and I never tried to get them back to work, but I wouldn't agree for a strike. But they – they closed us down, you know?

Interviewer: Well, let me ask you another question. Why was it that they came out of the wild cat strike? What was the issue?

Interviewee: Over about four places on Whitman's Creek, number 14 mine had a little streak of camel coal. And they had been putting that back, turning it back, not loading it with the other coal, see? You couldn't sell it that way. And they was putting it back and they'd get a car load of that, and they'd load it up, and they'd get the same pay for it as they were getting for the other.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: And they wanted pay for turning that back, see? It wasn't much else. Just an excuse or a strike's all they was wanting. A bunch of –

Female: Like they all do today.

Interviewee: Like they are today.

Female: When they take a notion one fella takes –

Interviewee: One fella – one fella can close down a mine with 1,000 people in it.

Female: Just [crosstalk] out and say let's go back home and that's it.

Interviewee: One picket, one picket. One picket, and close down a mine, and then a few will join. They close down everything around it.

Interviewer: And this was shortly after they organized.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: So –

Interviewee: Just a few months, yeah.

Interviewer: did the –

Interviewee: That – that's how come me and the company, I wouldn't agree. I took the union towards John L. Lewis, Van Bettner, to not call our men out, but the other five mines kept them out, see?

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: And finally they lost. That is, they lost getting paid for that, and they had to go back to work. And they was _____ and the company gave me a job then. They said – where they said they'd never give me a job, regardless.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: _____ on account of I was a hot organizer. _____ that way. I help organize every mine in Logan County, I reckon.

Interviewer: Can – you know, one thing I'd really love to hear about is sort of what was your procedure for organizing them mine? Sort of step by step, how did you go about it?

Interviewee: Well, you went to the people or the people come to you. Somebody had to take the lead in organizing, getting them to join, getting obligation, and that was all there was to it. You take 'em in then.

Interviewer: You see, but I'll tell you something.

Female: Well, tell them about the law.

Interviewer: You're – you're acting like – like I know something about it. You're – you're telling me – like you gotta tell me in more detail, because I really don't know anything about it. Like, you just say, well, we gave them an obligation. I don't know what means. What does that mean?

Interviewee: Well, that was an obligation or an oath that the miners takes. So, we'd get, say, 90 –

Female: If they wanted to join the union.

Interviewee: 95 percent of the miners at each mine, and that was easy done. After we broke through _____ Creek.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: And then would order a charter and got organized, and then –

Interviewer: And then they'd all sign the obligation.

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: Did you have a, like, a mass meeting in which they all signed up?

Interviewee: Oh, yeah, we had them every day some place then, when we was organizing, '33. We'd have thousands in marches – march on places, clear out.

Interviewer: Like, what would happen? I mean, you – they'd march on places? What does that mean?

Interviewee: Some people got their – that, well, say, 200 or 300 or 400 or 500 or 600 or 800 miners march on a place and they wasn't coming in, give them a pep talk and bring 'em in, put the fear of the Lord in them. But everybody wanted to. They just scared of losing their jobs and this, that, and the other. Now, we had –

Interviewer: So, they pretty much just had to be convinced that there were enough other people in there, so, to –

Interviewee: That it was going to be real, and it was. So, Island Creek was one of the richest coal companies at that time. I think it was about second –

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: in the nation. I think they're about third now, Island Creek Coal. It was tough and we faced high-powered rifles and everything else, first at Dehue. They had hundreds of thugs up there when we went to finishing organizing that. And we had the high sheriff of Logan County with us, and there was thousands of miners went up there, and we went up the head of that _____ private property and brought 'em out and organized them on site. Railroad and the high sheriff of Logan County, Sherman Smith, went with us.

Interviewer: Is Sherman still living?

Interviewee: He's still living down in Chapmansville right across from Chapmansville. A fine old man. And he cooperated and worked with us for sure. Him and his wife both live. Lives across the river from Chapmansville. He owns – he had owned a big farm in there. He's cut it all up now and they're selling it for lot, and he's got a fish pond and a big fish pond commercial.

Female: Over on Airport Road?

Interviewee: Yeah. No, yeah, on Airport Road.

Female: Airport Road _____

Interviewee: It's just, just –

Female: towards Chapman –

Interviewee: you go to Chapmanville, just across the bridge and keep to your right after you cross the bridge and he's just eighth of a mile from the bridge.

Interviewer: Now, you – you mentioned a little while ago that there were a number of wild cat strikes.

Interviewee: How many, they are, yeah, always have been. They are *[crosstalk]*

Interviewer: You see, I was wondering if before they got organized if there were that – if there were as many strikes, or whether kinda getting organized touch off a whole series of –

Interviewee: There wasn't too many. There wasn't too many before – until after we got fully organized, see?

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Interviewee: Wasn't too many. But after we really got organized and charters for the places, then we commenced to having wild cat strikes. A wild cat strike is a strike considered unauthorized by your district or international union, see?

[End of Audio]